

fractionated Knesset, which further clouds the outlook for stable governance. This is precisely what Benjamin Netanyahu is counting on. Although polls showed him leading both Barak and Sharon, he chose not to run this time around unless the Knesset dissolved itself and also stood for new elections. It was a statesmanlike position, praised by many, including some who do not normally count themselves among Netanyahu's most fervent admirers; it was also a position calculated to elevate his standing in the expectation that whoever is elected in February will not be able to lead for long before yet another round of voting, including parliamentary elections, is needed. At that time, Netanyahu, seeking to cast himself as the true centrist, would almost surely step into the political fray.

OVERRIDING POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC FACTORS

In the meantime, as Israeli politics seeks to sort itself against the backdrop of the deep and seemingly irreconcilable fissures in Israeli society, certain things seem clear and best not be forgotten.

First, many of the claims of the Israeli right, especially since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, have proved accurate, though they were largely ignored by those on the left who reflexively dismissed anything said by spokesmen on the right. For example, incitement to hatred among Palestinians has continued unabated and with devastating consequences. Moreover, the accumulation of weapons and the build-up of the Palestinian police and militia, in direct contravention of the Oslo Accords, have created a deadly adversary for Israel. And the wink and nod to Palestinian extremists—many arrested with great fanfare only to be released as soon as no one was paying attention—has undermined the chances for a peaceful settlement with Israel.

Second, many of the claims of the Israeli left have also proved strikingly accurate, despite attempts by those on the right to dismiss them. Palestinians who not docilely remain under Israeli occupation forever. Neither could Israel expect occupation to continue without some corrosive effects on its democratic values, nor could it absorb the Palestinians in the territories without undoing the Jewish character of the state. And sooner or later, Jewish settlers in remote outposts in Gaza, for example, would become flashpoints for violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Third, as a consequence, no one school of thought has a monopoly of wisdom on what is best for Israel. Ideologues, whether of the left or right, become prisoners of their own preset views, and, as a result, tend to adjust the facts to their doctrinal thinking rather than the other way around.

Fourth, regardless of what happens in the short run respecting Israeli-Palestinian issues, the sad reality is that Israel will continue to face severe challenges in the region, requiring a powerful military, eternal vigilance, and close coordination with the United States.

Iran and Iraq pose dangerous, and growing, threats, particularly in the nonconventional field. Islamic extremist groups operating in the region will not soon go away. Syria possesses missiles and chemical warheads. Disturbingly, Egypt has embarked on a broad modernization program of its conventional forces and is known to be engaged in research on some nonconventional weapons systems as well. An emerging Palestinian state will alter the political and security landscape for Jordan, with unknown consequences.

PRESSURES ON THE ARAB WORLD

And, of course, the larger problems of the need for a true reformation in the Arab

world, of the glaring absence of democracy and the rule of law, of governmental lack of accountability to its citizens, of endemic corruption and nepotism, of high birth rates and insufficient jobs, of economic stagnation and fear of opening to the world, of the Islamists influence on society, all continue to plague this vast and important region of the world.

A few pertinent statistics illustrate the dimensions of the problems faced by the Arab world. Fouad Ajami of Johns Hopkins University has pointed out, for example, that Finland, with a population of 5 million, exports more manufactured goods than the entire Arab world combined, with its 22 countries and its population well over 200 million. Israel has a higher per capita GNP than its five contiguous neighbors—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Egypt—combined, and more Internet users by far than all five put together. And impoverished Gaza has a higher birthrate by a multiple of nine than prosperous Bologna, Italy.

Fifth, we should be under little illusion about such notions as a “demilitarized Palestinian state” or “an end to the conflict.” A Palestinian state is coming, one way or another, and the debate about whether it is good or bad for Israel seems largely irrelevant. It will happen, and Israel no doubt will do its utmost to establish harmonious ties, but it must also recognize, as a recent CIA report looking ahead to the year 2015 predicted, that “chilly” relations are likely to prevail and surveillance and monitoring will be required.

That Palestinian state will not be demilitarized, I believe, regardless of agreements signed, which could pose a threat both to Israel and Jordan. And there will remain those Palestinians who will seek to continue the struggle with Israel, either because they see Israel proper as their real home, or because they see the Zionists as “infidels” and “modern-day Crusaders” who have no right to be there, or both.

Sixth, we need to take very seriously anti-Semitism emanating from the Arab world. Not only is it pernicious and contrary to the promotion of peaceful relations in the region, but it also fuels anti-Semitic attacks against Jews and Jewish targets throughout the world, as we have tragically seen in recent months.

And finally, we need to remind ourselves of the importance of our own role in making a difference on Israel's behalf. Both in our public education and advocacy efforts in the United States, in which we stress the mutual benefits of close U.S.-Israel ties as well as America's vital national interest in Israel's security in a stable Middle East, and in our diplomatic, exchange and public affairs programs around the world, the American Jewish Committee is making a unique contribution to Israel's well-being and its quest for peace and security. The political and security challenges that lie ahead for Israel will doubtless only heighten the importance of that work.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

HON. STEPHEN HORN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, they say the third time is the charm. This year the House will pass—for the third time—the Shays-Meehan or McCain-Feingold bill. By either name, this is

genuine, necessary and effective reform that will return power to the people and curb the endless money chase in our political campaigns.

This legislation ends the raising and spending of “soft” money. The parties have become addicted to huge checks from corporations, unions, and wealthy individuals. This bill puts both parties into immediate rehab.

This legislation also ends the sham “issue” ads that savage candidates of both parties in every election. It forces into the sunlight big money interests behind these ads.

The House has made it clear. It wants this reform to become law. This year, all of us hope that the Senate and our new President will look at this issue very carefully, offer constructive suggestions, and then join us in passing real campaign finance reform.

U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICY

HON. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I want to share with my colleagues an article written by Douglas Bloomfield for the Chicago Jewish Star. The article provides an accurate summary of President Clinton's efforts to facilitate peace and dialogue in the Middle East during his service to this country. I agree with Mr. Bloomfield that “No other (U.S.) President has been so closely identified with Israel's search for peace.”

Mr. Bloomfield's article discusses the popularity of President Clinton in Israel and among the Jewish Community in the United States due, in large part, to the commitment he made to do everything within his means to bring peace to the Middle East. I share that appreciation for the priority President Clinton made of these important issues. I have often looked to Mr. Bloomfield's work for an accurate perspective on events and trends in the Middle East as well as a constructive evaluation of U.S. Middle East policy. Clearly the Bush Administration has a tough act to follow in ensuring that Americans and Israeli's feel comfortable in America's commitment to the security of Israel and her prosperity in the future. I urge all of my colleagues to take the time to read the following article.

[From the Chicago Jewish Star]

WASHINGTON WATCH—SHALOM, BILL

(By Douglas M. Bloomfield)

“If Bill Clinton is looking for a job, he can come over there and run for prime minister. He'd win easily,” said a caller from Israel the other morning. “He's still the most popular politician in the country.”

And he remains popular at home as well, particularly in the Jewish community, despite the controversies that plagued his administration. The peace proposal he revealed recently in a farewell speech to peace activists included proposals that made even left even some dovish followers uncomfortable, but no reasonable person could challenge the sincerity of his desire to help Israel find peace.

Nor can anything overcome the hysterical frenzy of the Clinton haters and those extremists who see any concessions to the Palestinians as selling out Israel.

No other president has been so closely identified with Israel's search for peace. He

may have been motivated in part by a desire to leave a historic legacy, but as one of the savvyest politicians ever to occupy the Oval Office he long ago figured out there were far better ways to do that than by plunging into the Middle East morass.

Look instead to his relationship with the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who brought the completed Oslo agreement to Clinton with an appeal for help in implementing it. Clinton promised to minimize the risks for Israel and help smooth out the rough decisions. After Rabin's assassination, Clinton's commitment became a mission.

He can be faulted for pushing too long and too hard, especially after it should have been clear that he wanted peace more than the parties themselves, particularly Yasser Arafat.

He wrongly relied on Ehud Barak's faulty political instincts and novice politician's enthusiasm. The President ignored the advice of his own advisors, the Palestinians and some Israelis when he bowed to Barak's desire to convene last summer's abortive Camp David summit.

More recently, he has been trying to salvage a last minute agreement before leaving office—failing or refusing to hear the window of opportunity slam shut.

Clinton consistently overestimated his ability to affect Arafat's behavior, and he may have badly miscalculated the level of the Palestinian leader's commitment to a genuine peace.

Clinton has succeeded on so many fronts by dint of charm and personality, and he thought he could do it with Arafat as well. No other foreign leader has been to the White House as often, and Clinton's mistaken failure to demand Arafat pay more for that access only encouraged the Palestinian leader's obstinacy.

"He played Clinton Masterfully," said a former White House official. "Clinton felt he was giving peace every chance, but, like Rabin, Peres and Barak, he failed to hold Arafat's feet to the fire."

Clinton admonished Arafat in his speech earlier this month to Jewish leaders for fostering "the culture of violence and the culture of incitement." But his persistent reluctance to deal with Palestinian incitement was interpreted as a sign of weakness and may have fueled the current crisis.

Echoing a hopeful Israeli leaderships, he wrongly expected Israel's surprisingly forthcoming offers would elicit positive responses. But his blindness to Arafat's faults and deceptions may have encouraged the semi-retired terrorist to cling more tightly to his maximalist demands and let the Israelis negotiate with each other and with the Americans.

American and Israeli insiders say Clinton never pushed Israel without being encouraged by leaders there to give them a nudge and some political cover for tough decisions. But at the same time, Clinton mistakenly listened too much to some of his left-leaning Jewish friends who gave him bad advice on such things as his wife's meeting with Mrs. Arafat and his counter-productive confrontations with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

If Clinton was too intensely involved in the nitty gritty of the peace process, there is a greater risk that his successor will be too disengaged.

Whatever his shortcomings, there can be no questioning Clinton's commitment to Israel and its search for peace. He brought an unprecedented warmth and understanding, even as he demonstrated a genuine empathy for the Palestinians that won their trust.

A key to Clinton's winning the confidence of the Israelis and the vast majority of Jewish voters was his high comfort level with

the Jewish community at home. It is unmatched by any president, as is the affection and support he got in return.

That backing was bolstered by domestic policies that were in synch with most Jewish voters, particularly on issues such as church-state separation, civil liberties, reproductive rights, the environment, education and social welfare.

Jewish voters rewarded him and his vice president with nearly 80% of their votes in three national elections.

There were more Jewish officials at all levels of the Clinton administration than in any prior government; at one time there were six in Cabinet level posts, compared to none so far in the incoming Bush administration.

American Jews never felt on the outside during the Clinton years' that was particularly important since he followed a president who publicly questioned their patriotism.

He deserves enormous credit for his historic contribution to the struggle to bring a measure of justice to the survivors of the Holocaust after decades of frustration and inaction. His personal commitment and the intense involvement of his administration, particularly through the outstanding work of Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, helped end half a century of Swiss denial and stone-walling.

That personal involvement produced progress in such areas as the restitution of stolen property in other nations, compensation for slave and forced laborers, the settlement of insurance claims, the return of cultural artifacts and aid for the neediest of Hitler's remaining victims.

Credit is shared with an unlikely partner, former Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY). Although as chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, D'Amato was leading an investigation of the Clintons' Whitewater investments, both men rose above their political differences to cooperate fully in the Swiss investigations, realizing success beyond anyone's expectations.

Both the Administration and the Congress worked closely with the World Jewish Restitution Organization, representing both Israel and the diaspora, to bring about historic results.

I will leave it to others to chronicle Clinton's many shortcomings. I expect history will judge this flawed president more kindly than his contemporaries. He alone robbed his presidency of greatness as he demonstrated that in Washington most of the slings and arrows politicians suffer are self-inflicted.

But the Jewish community should be very grateful for his stewardship, for his dedication to assisting Israel in its search for peace, for his contribution to the survivors of the Holocaust and for his undeniable friendship.

HEALTH PREMIUMS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS SHOULD BE TAX DEDUCTIBLE ITEMS

HON. CLIFF STEARNS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, today, I will reintroduce legislation to allow health insurance premiums and unreimbursed prescription drug expenses to be tax deductible. Last year's bill number was H.R. 4472.

Under current law, employers can write off the cost of health care coverage purchased for their employees. Why can't individuals also be afforded the same opportunity to write off their

premiums and unreimbursed prescription drug expenses? The current tax code sets the threshold at 7.5 percent of adjusted gross income before an individual can write off their medical expenses. That doesn't seem right to me.

Currently, in order to claim health care expenses an individual must file an itemized tax return. I believe that all taxpayers should be allowed to deduct these out-of-pocket costs and that we need to include a place where this deduction could be taken on the short form such as the 1040 EZ and 1040A.

My bill also applies to the self-employed because individuals who are self-employed will not be eligible for a 100 percent write off until 2003.

This type of relief is long overdue. Allowing individuals to write off certain costly health care expenses they may incur would be a tremendous benefit that may not be available under the current system.

The National Taxpayers Union (NTU) endorsed my bill in the last congress.

LET'S NOT FORGET OUR FRIENDS ON TAIWAN

HON. EVA M. CLAYTON

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 31, 2001

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, as a new administration takes office, we wish to remind them and our colleagues in Congress that we must not forget our friends in the Republic of China on Taiwan. Let's not forget Taiwan has a democratically-elected president and a parliament that is fully committed to the free enterprise system, democracy, and human rights. Let us not forget that we need to give the Republic of China on Taiwan all the support she richly deserves.

As many of us know, Mr. Chen Shi-gian was elected president of the Republic of China last March and was inaugurated as President on May 20. He chose Dr. Hung-mao Tien as his Foreign Minister. Since assuming office in May, under the direction of President Chen Shui-bian, Foreign Minister Tien has clearly articulated Republic of China's foreign policy thrusts. Regarding the People's Republic of China, Minister Tien has made clear that peace and non-aggression are essential to ensure that the two entities engage in reasonable and responsible discussions. At the same time, President Chen has made a number of conciliatory gestures towards the mainland. Taiwan does not seek confrontation, but a friendly dialogue with mainland China leading to future talks on all issues, including eventual reunification.

In terms of solidifying friendship and ties with ROC's allies, President Chen and Minister Tien have traveled far and wide. Last year they completed a grueling 2-week journey of friendship to ROC's allies in Central America and Africa. Minister Tien also traveled to Europe to strengthen Taiwan's ties with friendly nations.

It is our understanding that to seek greater international recognition, Taiwan will continue to seek a return to the United Nations and other international organizations. It is our view that a worthy nation like Taiwan must be given its proper recognition in the community of nations.